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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000901

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TAGS: PREL PINS PINR ML
SUBJECT: NORTHERN MALI: ALGIERS ACCORDS OPTIMISM
OVERSHADOWS BAHANGA'S RETURN

REF: BAMAKO 00624

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: The Algiers Accords oversight committee met in Kidal November 15-17 to discuss reductions in Malian troop levels per the Algiers Accords and a timeline for the creation of one mixed military unit by December 30. Ibrahim Bahanga, who returned to Mali after a month long sojourn in Libya, was invited to participate but did not attend and sent no one from his Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC) in his place. On November 18 Bahanga's Paris-based father-in-law issued a statement on behalf of the ATNMC declaring that no meeting between the Malian government and "Tuareg rebels" occurred. The statement also warned that movements by the Malian military could provoke "serious repercussions" in the days ahead. Following the committee meeting, Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) spokesman and National Assembly Deputy Ahmada ag Bibi left Kidal to return to the ADC's base in Tigharghar to brief fellow ADC members, then meet with Ibrahim Bahanga. Although Mali and the ADC appear equally optimistic, clouds still loom on the horizon. Bahanga's position, and the fate of the four Malian military officers he is still holding, remain unknown. Nor is it clear who would command a mixed military unit provided one is created by the end of December. End Summary.

Kidal Rendez-Vous

2.(C) The Algiers Accords oversight committee, composed of representatives from the Malian government, Algeria and the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), convened in Kidal on November 15-17 to discuss future steps toward implementing the Accords. ADC spokesman and National Assembly Deputy Ahmada ag Bibi led the Tuareg contingent, along with fellow rebels Cheick ag Aoussa and Bayen ag Akhawali. Five Malian government Ministers happened to be in Kidal during the November 15-17 time frame, but only two of these - Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone and Minister of Internal Security Sadio Gassama - participated in talks with the ADC. The Ministers of Tourism, Culture, and Transportation traveled to Kidal to celebrate the opening of the Kidal "tourist" season.

3.(C) On November 19 ag Bibi told the Embassy's locally employed Tuareg political specialist that the three-way discussions produced tangible results and that all of the Malian military's check-points and patrols around Kidal would be handed over to members of a newly-created mixed military unit composed of re-integrated Tuareg rebel fighters and Malian soldiers by December 30. This would fulfill stipulations in the Algiers Accords requiring the Malian military to reduce its footprint in the north to pre-May 2006 levels. Ag Bibi left Kidal after the meeting to return to the

ADC's base in Tigharghar to brief the ADC's rank and file.

4.(C) Kidal's Governor, Alhamadou ag Illyene, was also optimistic. He told the Embassy that ADC members selected to serve in mixed military units would begin returning to Kidal as early as December 2 and would help fill the security vacuum left by repositioned Malian soldiers. On November 19 Kader Bah, who is a senior official within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and a close confidant of Kafougouna Kone and President Amadou Toumani Toure, confirmed that a tentative agreement had been reached but cautioned that Algeria was running the show and that Mali's over-riding interest for the moment was reducing tensions in Kidal in order to ensure the success of upcoming municipal elections scheduled for May or June 2009. Bah complained that that the mixed unit was largely an Algerian creation.

All-Drama Bahanga

5.(C) Ag Bibi told the Embassy he will also try to persuade Bahanga to either participate in the Algiers Accords implementation process or simply lie low. Bahanga's return to northern Mali was particularly unwelcome. Many Tuaregs believed Bahanga had moved to Libya permanently, citing rumors that Bahanga had shifted his family from the Algerian town of Tamanrasset to Tripoli and had received a house from Qadhafi. One person likely pleased by Bahanga's reappearance was Hama ag Sid'Ahmed, Bahanga's Paris-based father-in-law and ATNMC spokesman. In July the Algerian Ambassador to Mali prevailed on Sid'Ahmed to restrain his penchant for ill-timed

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and ill-worded communiques, resulting in several statement-free months from Sid'Ahmed (reftel). Perhaps eager to make up for lost time, on November 18 Sid'Ahmed issued a statement on behalf of the ATNMC accusing the Malian government of "rejecting all attempts for constructive dialogue with the Tuareg Alliance" and said the ATNMC interpreted this "rejection" as synonymous with an invitation to the use of force. Sid'Ahmed complained that "thousands" of Malian soldiers had arrived in Kidal during the week and warned that "this provocative statement by Malian government authorities could have serious repercussions on the ground in the days to come."

Comment: Bahanga is in the Details

6.(C) Optimism emanating from the November 15-17 meeting Kidal largely overshadowed concerns regarding Bahanga's unwelcome return to northern Mali. However, members of the Algiers Accords oversight committee left, perhaps purposely, several sensitive issues unresolved. One of the most important issues is the command of a new mixed unit. There seems to be little consensus within the ranks of Tuareg rebels regarding who should command the new unit. Various Tuareg factions have already floated three names. Kidal's ruling Intallah family is believed to favor ADC commander Bah Moussa. Members of the Tuareg Kel Ireyakkan fraction, which includes ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali, seem to prefer ADC member and Malian army Captain Ibrahim ag Banna. Bahanga and the ATNMC's preferred candidate is probably Hassan Fagaga who recently deserted the ATNMC to rejoin the ADC but still belongs to Bahanga's Ifergoumessen fraction of Kidal Tuareg Ifoghas. This poses a problem for the Malians since all three of these individuals are implicated in the capture and killing of Malian soldiers. Of these, Fagaga is probably the least likely choice given his unpredictability and the fact that the last time he was named mixed unit commander he went AWOL to join Bahanga.

7.(C) Bahanga's position is somewhat weaker than it was

earlier this year. Fagaga and other key ATNMC members' defection back to the ADC, coupled with Bahanga's turn toward Libya, have weakened the ATNMC. Yet Bahanga still holds four Malian military officers as bargaining chips and could derail the entire process by embarking on another of his quixotic attacks against Malian military patrols.

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